Chapter II

CHINA'S NUCLEAR OPTION AND SINO-AMERICAN RELATIONS, 1963-1964
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Until the signing of the Test-Ban Treaty of 1963 the general practice everywhere was to seek to explain the nature of the Sino-Soviet dispute primarily in ideological terms. The Test-Ban Treaty, and the circumstances attendant upon its formulation and signature, however, revealed that the Sino-Soviet polemics involved a whole set of other, extra-ideological issues as well. The dispute hinged on the vital national interests of the two countries, as also the sensitive issue of national security. As the dispute widened into an open rift, it produced inevitably a major effect on Sino-American relations. With the deterioration in Sino-Soviet relations, China's relations with the United States, too, entered upon a new era. This era was characterized by two phases -- the phase of sharp hostility and the phase of a gradual thaw. During the first phase, Sino-US relations registered a slump, and there was increased hostility. The question of the Test-Ban Treaty, besides factors like Vietnam, played a large role in embittering relations between Washington and Peking. It is, therefore, pertinent to study in detail the stances and perceptions of the two countries on the issue of the Test-Ban Treaty and their immediate impact on their relationship.

I. Importance of the Issue

The Sino-Soviet rift widened sharply as a result of the dispute over nuclear weapons. In an official statement on
15 August 1963 China made it evident that it took strong exception to the decision of the Soviet Union not to honour its agreement with China to supply nuclear weapons. It added:

As far back as June 20, 1959, when there was not yet the slightest sign of a treaty on stopping nuclear tests, the Soviet Government unilaterally tore up the agreement on new technology for national defence concluded between China and the Soviet Union on October 16, 1957, and refused to provide China with a sample of an atomic bomb and technical data concerning its manufacture. This was done as a presentation gift at the time the Soviet leaders went to the United States for talks with Eisenhower in September. (1)

Thus the issue of nuclear weapons played a major part not only in the origin of Sino-Soviet differences but also in their development into a major rift. The cover of ideology was unmasked with the signing of the Test-Ban Treaty, and an unprecedented exchange took place between the two countries on the basis of their respective perceptions of their national interests.

China’s first reaction to the Test-Ban Treaty came in a statement on 31 July 1963. China accused the Soviet Union of capitulating to the United States and described the treaty as "a dirty fraud and an alliance" aimed against it. Its repeated references to the treaty as anti-Chinese in the months that followed made it amply clear that ideology was not the only factor, not even the primary factor, in the Sino-Soviet quarrel.

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The Soviet Union rejected Peking's charges on 3 August 1963. It argued that though the Test-Ban Treaty was a partial measure in so far as it did not ban all nuclear weapons at one stroke, it was "better to have a part than to do nothing". It declared emphatically that the treaty was "in the interest of peace and socialism". It denied that US imperialism had gained an advantage, and said that the USSR had the most powerful weapons and means of delivery in the world and was capable of smashing any target. It accused China of joining hands with US "madmen and French and West German extremists and [of] being absolutely out of touch with reality in matters involving the lives of millions of people". It tried to show how the Chinese statement ran counter to the Leninist policy of peaceful co-existence between states with different social systems. "The Chinese leaders", it declared, had placed themselves "openly against the Socialist Commonwealth, the whole world communist movement, and all the peace-loving peoples of Europe, Asia, Africa and America".

China retaliated by issuing a most hard-hitting statement on 15 August 1963. Not only did it reiterate its charge that the

3 Ibid., vol. 6, no. 33, 16 August 1963, pp. 16-17.  
4 Ibid., p. 18. It also added: "Who empowered the Government of the PRC to speak in the name of the Soviet people and for them? Who asked to speak for the peoples of the other socialist countries. The authors of the statement must be losing their minds if...they seek, in their statement, to counterpose the Soviet people to Soviet government".
Soviets had abjectly capitulated to imperialism, but it denounced the Soviet Union for its alleged breach of faith in refusing to supply a sample atomic bomb in 1959 under an agreement reportedly signed two years earlier. This act of perfidy on the part of the Soviet Union, according to China, symbolized the birth of a new phase of international relations disadvantageous to China. In line with its perfidious behaviour, China noted, the Soviet Union had taken the most objectionable step of signing the Test-Ban Treaty with the West in clear disregard of China's views as contained in the communications it had sent to Moscow on 3 September 1962, 20 October 1962 and 6 June 1963. The Soviet purpose, China argued, was clearly to "curry favour with US imperialism by discontinuing assistance to China". Although the Sino-Soviet ideological debate had started even before, the dispute, which later became an open rift, originated with the alleged Soviet refusal to supply a sample atomic bomb.

On 1 September 1963 a spokesman of the Government of China gave a detailed reply to the Soviet Government statement of 21 August 1962. He vehemently criticized the Soviet Union. He accused the Soviet side of carrying on false propaganda that China wanted socialism to win by means of a thermonuclear war and that China was prepared to sacrifice half of mankind in a thermonuclear war. He reiterated his Government's view that

the Soviet leaders were following a "capitulationist stand".  

On 6 September 1963 China replied to certain charges contained in an open letter issued on behalf of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) on 14 July 1963. It accused the Soviet Union of pushing Sino-Soviet relations "to the brink of a split". It criticized the USSR for its alleged revisionism and highlighted its differences with the USSR in such matters as relations with the United States, India, and Yugoslavia. As before, it characterized the Soviet attitude towards the United States as capitulationist. It denounced the Soviet Union for its alleged policy of allying with the United States on the "pretext" of "peaceful competition". It took exception to the Soviet supply of economic and military aid to India at the time of hostilities between India and China. Again, improved relations between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, according to China, amounted to a betrayal of Marxism-Leninism. It pointed out that Yugoslavia was a "revisionist", not "a socialist country".

China's criticism of the USSR was very sharp "on the question of Stalin" also. China held that in the garb of opposing Stalin's personality cult, Khrushchev was supporting "revisionism" in the USSR. He was not only undermining the "proletarian revolutionary

6 News From Xinhua News Agency (London), no. 2044, 1 September 1963, Supplement no. 35, pp. 1-16.

movement but also interfering in the internal affairs of fraternal parties”.

China found it especially hard to forgive the Soviet Union for following policies similar to those of Yugoslavia, a "revisionist" country. It viewed Russian support of Yugoslavia as representing a "dangerous trend". It held that both the USSR and Yugoslavia had betrayed the fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism by supporting "peaceful transition to socialism" and championing a policy of "peaceful co-existence" with the imperialists in international affairs.

The Soviet reaction to all these criticisms was naturally quite sharp. In a statement the Soviet Government accused China of "staking the lives of hundreds of millions of people, including the Chinese people, in a thermonuclear war". It characterized the Chinese view on the use of nuclear weapons as "anti-Marxist, anti-Leninist, inhuman". It drew attention to the ingratitude of the Chinese leaders in abusing the Soviet Union for possessing nuclear arms and in forgetting that by virtue of its nuclear strength Russia had in fact helped "China's peaceful construction at home by protecting it". In another statement

8 In the question of Stalin... (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1963), pp. 1-35.
10 Peking Review, vol. 6, no. 36, 6 September 1963, p. 22.
11 Ibid., pp. 20-21.
on 21 September 1963 the Soviet Government accused China of "hypocrisy". It said that China was finding itself isolated in the face of overwhelming world opinion in favour of the test-Ban treaty.

An article in Kommunist on 13 October 1963 described China as a country which was anti-Marxist in theory, which was guilty of fostering a personality cult, which sought to maintain internal tensions in the sphere of foreign affairs, and which betrayed want of faith in the role of the socialist camp as the most effective instrument in the development of the modern world.

Was the Test-Ban Treaty of 1963 the cause or the consequence of the Sino-Soviet rift? There can be two opinions on this subject. It may be said that if one sought to compare the importance of the Test-Ban with other issues exacerbating Sino-Soviet relations prior to July 1963, it would be difficult to point to any other that so consistently gnawed at what both sides regarded as their vital interests, whose symbolic and material significance was so great in itself, or whose ramifications penetrated so many areas of the dispute. (16)


13 "Marxism-Leninism Is the Basis for the Unity of the Communist Movement", Kommunist (Moscow), 18 October 1963. Also see Griffith, n. 12, p. 467.


15 Ibid., p. 155. For a detailed discussion, see Walter C. Cleamens, Jr., The Arms Race and Sino-Soviet Relations (Contd. on next page)
As the \text{\textregistered}Sino-Soviet dispute widened into a rift, one noticed increasing US-Soviet co-operation in the matter of halting nuclear proliferation and other, related issues. In short there was a let-up in the Cold War. Correspondingly China’s relations with the United States, already hostile, further deteriorated. China had no alternative but to oppose the United States. The United States, too, on its part felt the need to take a tough line towards China. This was because China, being dissatisfied with the situation brought about by the limited 
\textit{rapprochement} between the United States and the Soviet Union after the Test-Ban Treaty, was looking out for an opportunity to thwart what it regarded as a design by the two Super Powers to impose their will on the rest of the world.

\textbf{II. Chinese Attitude After the Signing of the Test-Ban Treaty}

China’s violent reaction to the signing of the Test-Ban Treaty might seem at first sight as a protest against the policies of disarmament followed by the United States and the Soviet Union. If, however, one considers the sequence of events closely and makes a detailed study of the evolution of China’s attitude towards nuclear weapons during the sixties and seventies, one can see what exactly was at stake. The Test-Ban Treaty demonstrated China’s isolation in the world. China felt that its voice was not being heard as much it ought to be on account of the new

\textit{(Stanford, Calif.: The Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, 1968).}
balance of power that was coming into being. It, therefore, decided upon a change of strategy. Even a literal reading of the Chinese statement of 31 July would show China's basic political purpose is opposing the treaty. China argued:

The central purpose of this treaty is, through a partial ban on nuclear tests, to prevent all the threatened peace-loving countries, including China, from increasing their defence capability, so that the United States may be more unbridled in threatening and blackmailing these countries. (16)

It felt that its interests had been sold out by the Soviet Union and that the Soviet Union had made an ally of the United States "to oppose China". Unable to hide its dissatisfaction about the emergence of a new balance of power, it argued that the United States, the Soviet Union, and Britain—the nuclear Powers that had signed the Test-Ban Treaty—were attempting to "consolidate their nuclear monopoly and bind the hands of all the peace-loving countries subjected to the nuclear threat". It even feared that the nuclear Powers might try to isolate it and even encircle it. Thus, it perceived the new balance of power that appeared to be emerging with the dominance of the two big Powers in mutual co-operation as directed against its interests.

16 People of the World Unite... n. 1, p. 2. Emphasis added.
17 Ibid., pp. 3-4.
18 Ibid., p. 1.
China held that the prohibition of nuclear weapons and the outlawing of nuclear war were major questions affecting the destiny of all countries, big and small. It argued that such questions should not be decided exclusively by a few nuclear Powers.

On 2 August the Chinese Prime Minister, Chou En-lai, sent letters to all heads of Government in an effort obviously to acquaint them with his country's position as regards nuclear proliferation and to frustrate the U.S.-Soviet "design" by appropriate steps on the political level. The letter suggested a conference of all heads of Government "to discuss the question of complete, thorough, total and resolute prohibition and destruction of nuclear weapons". It proposed that "all countries in the world, both nuclear and non-nuclear, should solemnly declare that they will prohibit and destroy nuclear weapons completely, thoroughly, totally and resolutely" and that in order to fulfil the above undertakings step by step, they should dismantle all military bases, establish nuclear-weapons-free zones, refrain from exporting or importing nuclear weapons, and cease all nuclear tests. (20)

China knew that a meeting of heads of Government was not practicable. Even then it called for such a meeting because it

19 Ibid. For Premier Chou En-lai's letter of 2 August 1963 to all heads of government, ibid., pp. 7-8.
20 Ibid.
felt that it served the political purpose of appearing to champion the cause of non-nuclear countries, both big and small. Its appeal for a meeting of heads of government was also part of its strategy of forming a "united front" and of isolating the United States, if possible, from countries like France. In the event of its proposal being accepted, with a nuclear attack being wholly ruled out, China would be almost invincible with its large army equipped with conventional weapons. Any rejection of the proposal, on the other hand, would leave China free to pursue its own search for nuclear weapons.

The US Government categorized the Chinese proposal as unrealistic, and said that it did not merit serious attention. A Jen-min Jih-pao editorial on 2 August 1963 justified the Chinese stand on lines similar to those of the article published on 31 July 1963. It criticized the United States for dividing the countries of the world into two categories, nuclear and non-nuclear, and for placing the non-nuclear countries at the mercy of the nuclear Powers. What hurt China most was what Moscow's readiness "to strike a bargain" with the imperialists. It was worried over its own security although, for public consumption, it pretended that the whole world was in danger of US nuclear blackmail.

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21 For arguments on similar lines, see Leo Yuen-yum Liu, China as a Nuclear Power in World Politics (London, 1972), p. 27.

A *Jen-min* editorial on 3 August criticized the Soviet Union for "selling out" to the United States. It expressed China's concern about the new balance of power emerging from the Camp David talks. China felt that this new balance gave clear indication of the intention of the United States and the Soviet Union to proceed along the "path of US-Soviet co-operation to dominate the world". It saw itself as the victim of the understanding that the two Super Powers had reached between themselves:

It is most obvious that the tripartite treaty is aimed at tying China's hands. The US representative to the Moscow talks has said publicly that the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union were able to arrive at an agreement, because "we could work together to prevent China getting a nuclear capability". Recently, while fraternizing with U.S. imperialism on the most intimate terms, the Soviet leaders and the Soviet press gnashed their teeth in their bitter hatred towards socialist China. They use the same language as U.S. imperialism's to abuse China. *Ibid* is a US-Soviet alliance against China pure and simple. (24)

Understandably China gave considerable attention to "exposing" how the treaty only helped the United States without in any way reducing the danger of a nuclear war. The treaty had binding force on non-nuclear Power only. The United States was still free to carry out underground nuclear tests, and the treaty helped legalize US actions. The United States argued that the

23 Griffith, n. 12, pp. 94-95.


China saw in the signing of the treaty a change in the world balance of power unfavourable to it. It held that the US and the USSR primarily aimed at depriving it of its right to acquire a nuclear capability.
treaty was the first step towards peace. China challenged this view. It said that it only aggravated the danger of a nuclear war. What was worse, it regarded it as constituting "a political deal" between the two nuclear Powers.

Peking issued a statement on 15 August in reply to the Soviet statement of 3 August. In this statement it spelt out its opposition to the various provisions of the Test-Ban treaty.

China took the line that the newly emerging balance of power prejudiced its legitimate interests. It reiterated that it "would not tolerate the conclusion, in disregard of China's opposition, of any sort of treaty between the Soviet Government and the United States which aimed at depriving the Chinese people of their right to take steps to resist the nuclear threats of US imperialism". It pointed out how its repeated warnings in the matter had gone unheeded. It said that the Soviet Union had "brazenly ganged up with the imperialist bandits in exerting pressure on China".

China also gave sufficient indication that it was deter-
minded to develop nuclear weapons. It declared:

Nuclear weapons in the possession of a socialist country are always a means of defence against nuclear blackmail and nuclear war. So long as the imperialists refuse to ban nuclear weapons, the greater the number of socialist countries possessing them, the better the guarantee of world peace. (27)

25 Ibid.
26 See People of the World Unite..., n. 1, p. 30.
27 Ibid., p. 22.
Furthermore, China argued that in fighting aggression and defending its security every Socialist country must needs rely in the first place on its own defence capability. It said that just because the Soviet Union possessed nuclear weapons, other Socialist countries could not be told to deny themselves the right to increase their defence capabilities.

China sharply criticized the US stand. In its view the United States wanted a ban on nuclear tests for its own benefit. It said that the world situation was unfavourable to the United States and that while retaining the means of "massive retaliation" the United States was seeking to carry out its "strategy of flexible response", which meant "preparing for both nuclear war and conventional war and both continuing the development of strategic nuclear weapons as a means of nuclear blackmail and threats and energetically developing tactical nuclear weapons in preparation for launching 'limited nuclear wars' when necessary". China maintained that the United States should bear full responsibility for the pollution of the atmosphere. It accused the United States of being engaged "frenziedly" in the expansion of nuclear armaments. The treaty, it insisted, did not hurt or hinder the United States, for it had freedom to conduct about eighty per cent of the nuclear tests it deemed necessary.

28 Ibid., p. 21.
29 Ibid., p. 15.
30 Ibid., p. 18.
As to the question of nuclear proliferation, China maintained that the US objective was to "manacle all socialist countries other than the Soviet Union". It said that there was hardly any relaxation of tensions in the international situation. Numerous facts show that, in the struggle against imperialism, relaxation that is won through struggle is a genuine relaxation, while relaxation brought by capitulation is a false relaxation. The so-called relaxation now appearing between the United States and the Soviet Union is only a transient and superficial phenomenon and a false relaxation.... (32)

China continued to maintain that it supported destruction of all nuclear weapons and renewed its appeal for a world conference for the destruction of nuclear weapons.

Earlier, too, there were critical comments in the Chinese Press. A commentary put out by the New China News Agency (NCNA) criticized the US policy as an attempt for "world-wide aggression based on... [the] position of nuclear strength". The US purpose, it alleged, was to prevent the Socialist countries other than the Soviet Union from increasing their nuclear strength.

Many mass rallies were organized in China. At all these rallies the Test-Ban Treaty was denounced as a fraud. China's massive propaganda was aimed at attracting the attention of the other countries of the world and to impress upon them that the treaty did not serve their interests and that it only helped the

31 Ibid., p. 21.
32 Ibid., p. 24.
nuclear Powers.

China's World outlook and Strategy

The Test-Ban treaty aggravated the Sino-Soviet conflict. China lost all hope that the Soviet Union would come to its rescue in the event of an American attack. It also ruled out the possibility of its realizing its national objectives like the recovery of Taiwan with the support of the Soviet Union. It saw that the international scene was increasingly being dominated by the two Super Powers and that this meant that its own options were getting circumscribed at a time when its national objectives had not yet been realized. Naturally, therefore, it became an anti-status quo Power. It became necessary for it to take a fresh view of the world in terms of the Maoist world outlook.

China's appreciation of the world situation at this time could be summed up in ideological terms as follows. The United States was China's principal enemy, and China should, therefore, form the "broadest united front" against the United States. It should also mobilize the countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America as these, too, were oppressed by US imperialism. It was

34 Ibid., no. 3034, 7 August 1963; ibid., no. 3037, 12 August 1963; ibid., no. 3044, 21 August 1963; and JPRI Communist China Digest, no. 100, 1963, pp.

necessary in the interest of achieving economic and political independence to co-operate and unitedly fight imperialism and colonialism both old and new.

China's main strategy was to adopt a militant posture in international affairs, to emphasize the importance of national liberation wars, to underestimate the power of the United States, to highlight the contradictions in the US camp, and to cultivate the countries located in a zone consisting of Europe, Oceania, and Canada, a zone which it called the "second intermediate zone". On 27 December 1963, an AJNA correspondent wrote that as the year 1963 was drawing to a close, "the multilateral contradictions among the western imperialist Powers - namely the United States, Britain, France and West Germany - remain as acute as ever".

China lacked the necessary military and economic components of power to be heard in the world arena. So it placed the accent on Asian-African solidarity in the hope of gaining political leverages.

In March 1964 China vigorously supported the cause of Asian-African solidarity at the sixth session of the Afro-Asian

36 For the Chinese delegate's speech at Algiers on 24 March 1964, see JCP, no. 3133, 31 March 1964, pp. 29-34.


38 JCP, no. 3131, 3 January 1964, p. 37.
Solidarity Council held in Algiers. The Chinese delegate referred to the US "political intrigues" in new countries, to US interference in the internal affairs of other countries, and to the US attempts at subversion of governments. He argued against exclusive reliance on the principle of "peaceful co-existence with imperialism". He said that such reliance amounted to keeping themselves perpetually under enslavement. Kuo Chien, the Chinese delegate to the conference, raised the Test-Ban issue. He said that his country regarded the prevention of nuclear war and defence of world peace as matters of vital interest to peoples throughout the world and that all countries were entitled to contribute to that end.

A preparatory meeting for the Second African-Asian Conference was held at Jakarta on 10-15 April 1964. In a speech there on 11 April China's Vice-Premier, Che Yi, charged that the imperialists headed by the United States were "carrying out an all-out arms expansion, stepping up preparations for a nuclear war, and practising nuclear monopoly and blackmail". He, therefore, stressed the need for unity among all Asian-African countries. On 18 April an editorial in Jen-min Jih-pao said that the preparatory meeting was a great success. In its view it said that the meeting signified the victory of the Bandung

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40 Ibid., p. 34.
41 JPRS Communist China Digest, no. 122, 16 June 1964, p. 2.
spirit to fight "imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism".

China's strategy of forging a united front against the United States received considerable support during Premier Chou En-lai's trip to Asia and Africa in 1964. It adopted this strategy largely in response to the developing detente between the USA and the USSR. Peking appeared to have convinced itself that this detente was a hindrance in the way of the realization of what it regarded as its basic interests.

III. U.S. Reactions to Chinese Statements on Test-Ban and Its Implications

It was obviously in the context of this developing dialogue with the Soviet Union that, in a speech at the American University, Washington, D.C., on 10 June, President John F. Kennedy gave a formal call for making serious efforts to end the Cold War, which had bedevilled US-USSR relations. Pointing out that the Soviet Union and the United States had started negotiating for a partial Test-Ban Treaty, he stressed the common areas of co-operation between the two countries. He said: "Among the many traits our two peoples have in common, none is stronger than our mutual abhorrence of war.... The USA and its allies have a mutually deep interest in a just and genuine peace and in halting the arms race". He said that he regarded agreements to that end as being in the interest of both the countries.

42 *News From Hainhua News Agency*, no. 2269, 18 April 1964, p. 11.

declared that even the most hostile nation could be relied upon to honour its treaty obligations which concerned its national interest.

In contrast, the Americans regarded China as the greatest danger to independent nations. Roger Hillsman, US Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs, said in a speech that the United States could not look on idly while communism was taking over Asia. "For this reason we do not recognize Communist China and seek in all possible ways to limit the ability of Communist China to implement its threat to obtain hegemony in the Far East", he added.

Even before the conclusion of the Test-Ban Treaty, the United States had realized that the Sino-Soviet dispute had developed into a major rift. Official US sources traced the origin of the dispute to the Soviet withdrawal of economic and military aid to China. Though they saw the dangers as well as the opportunities afforded by the rift, they made it clear that in their view China was more "belligerently aggressive" than the Soviet Union.

The United States did foresee that the Test-Ban Treaty would provoke criticism from many countries of the world, and yet it signed it. This was because it wanted to avail itself

44 Ibid.
45 *Department of State Bulletin*, vol. 49, no. 1254, 8 July 1963, p. 43.
46 Ibid., vol. 49, no. 1255, 15 July 1963, p. 82.
of the benefit of the Sino-Soviet rift along with reducing the danger of a nuclear war. It knew that China wanted to develop nuclear weapons, but it assumed that China would take "some years, maybe a decade" to become a full-fledged nuclear Power. The Chinese menace was, however, a major concern of the United States at this time. Kennedy said on 1 August 1963:

...we assess its power at 700 million people...surrounded by countries which are in every case but one, much smaller, which are faced with very difficult geographic and social problems, which do not have a strong national history. So that we find a great, powerful force in China, organized and directed by the government along Stalinist lines, surrounded by weaker countries. So this we regard as a menacing situation. (47)

Chinese statements and the Sino-Soviet rift were discussed more openly by US officials after the signing of the Test-Ban Treaty. Averell Harriman said in a National Broadcasting Corporation television interview on 28 July that one of the reasons why the Soviets signed the treaty was "their relations with Peking". He said that each was issuing long letters. "So we know pretty much what their differences are. But it does seem as if the Soviet Union wanted to make this agreement for some reason because of the conflict which quite obviously exists". The US Secretary of State, Dean Husk, taking part in the same discussion, said that he believed in the usefulness of peaceful co-existence with the USSR. He argued that there was a "common interest" between the United States and the USSR in avoiding war. In an indirect

reference to China he said that those having nuclear weapons had a "much more direct and operational sense of what a nuclear war means" than those who did not possess such weapons.

On 31 July, in a speech before the National Press Club, Harriman traced the Sino-Soviet dispute to the Soviet withdrawal of technical assistance and other such issues. He said that since the Cuban crisis both countries had spoken "pretty rough things about each other - and some more this morning about this test-ban treaty". He referred to the Chinese description of the treaty as a fraud perpetrated by Khrushchev and as a sell-out to the imperialists.

The course of the Sino-Soviet rift after the treaty and the bitter exchanges between the two Communist giants confirmed the US view that the Soviet Union was clashing with China over the issue of nuclear weapons and was, therefore, under a compulsion to behave more responsibly. Harriman pointed out how Khrushchev and the CPSU had repeatedly declared their determination to preserve the peace of the world, and added: "...whereas China is the one that is dangerous, the Chinese communists are the ones that are going to lead the world to nuclear holocaust, and that is what is the major issue between them".

Simultaneously the Americans realized that, China's capacity being limited, it was necessary not to allow any feeling
of panic to develop among the countries of Asia in regard to China's capability. Analysing the views of US officials, a senior columnist, Tad Szulc, wrote in the New York Times of 31 July, after China's bitter criticism of the Test-Ban treaty, that he agreed with the view that despite its isolation as a result of the treaty, China would not commit any major aggression in Asia and that it would continue to adhere to its policy of "minimum risks" in foreign affairs. He linked China's reluctance to take risks in foreign affairs to its "failures" at the home front. US officials publicly maintained that even if China developed nuclear weapons in the sixties, it would not be a major event in Asia or in world politics.

The United States regarded China's pronouncements on the Test-Ban Treaty as demonstrating aggressive tendencies. It, however, appeared to belittle the danger of China's coming into possession of nuclear weapons. It did so because it found it obviously advantageous politically to array more countries against China by showing up its aggressiveness. It also saw the wisdom of under-playing the threat that China posed to other countries in Asia. It did not want to do or say anything that might exaggerate the strength of China and compel the Asian nations to come to terms with China and recognize it as the predominant force in Asia.

On 20 August 1963 Roger Hilsman summed up the US view of the danger posed by China. He said that the "facade of Communist

China" was "bold and dangerous-looking". All the same, he felt that the Chinese power was dwindling as a "self-serving leadership" was "set in opposition to the rest of humanity". President Kennedy warned on the one hand that if China continued to pursue the same old policies in the sixties, it could "create a potentially more dangerous situation than any we have faced since the end of the second war". He also maintained, on the other hand, that there was no indication of a major flare-up in Asia leading to a direct conflict with the United States.

The military implications of a possible nuclear explosion by China were discussed in detail in the United States. The US Administration's various perceptions, some of which might appear to be a little too dialectical, may be set forth briefly, as follows. US policy-makers were convinced that China was in bad shape owing partly to the Soviet withdrawal of aid and partly to the failure on the home front and that if the situation did not improve soon enough from China's point of view it might be unable to mount major military operations. And yet they thought that they needed to watch China rather carefully as it was a "sufficiently strong military Power", a power capable of embarking upon some "reckless, even desperate actions" if they pressed it too hard. Though they ruled out China's emergence as a major military power "in the foreseeable future", yet they conceded its


capability to explode a nuclear device and pose a potential threat.

US officials stressed in particular the difference between the ability to develop a first test device and the ability to deliver nuclear weapons on foreign targets. It was not too difficult for a country like China to develop a first test device, but it might take many years for it to develop the ability to deliver nuclear weapons on targets in far-off countries. In view of this, what policy-makers were worried over was the psychological rather than the military effect of a possible nuclear explosion by China. They did not believe that the Chinese would acquire the capability to deliver nuclear weapons outside the periphery of their country for a long time and thus pose a military danger to the West. They, however, felt that a nuclear device in the hands of China might unduly awe the nations of Asia and make them accept China as a force strong enough to be reckoned with on a par with the Super Powers.

Another subject that occupied the minds of US policy-makers at this time was the impact of the Sino-Soviet rift on world affairs. There were many interpretations. Dean Rusk felt that there was no "complete break" between China and the Soviet Union although the dispute between them was "fundamental and far-reaching, embracing ideology, struggle for influence in other

54 For the text of Roger Hilsman's speech of 20 August 1963, see Department of State Bulletin, vol. 49, no. 1263, 9 September 1963, pp. 386-93.

55 Ibid., p. 389.
parts of the world, economic interests, state relationships, and personal rivalries”. Roger Hilsman, in a speech on 25 January 1964, characterized the dispute as a "serious" one. During the initial stages of the conflict, the United States thought it best to exercise caution in analysing the implications of the split. Rusk said on 10 September 1963: "...we should not take cheap comfort from that historic break. It eliminates none of the dangers that hang over us and makes none of our immediate tasks appreciably easier". On the other hand, Thomas L. Hughes, Director of Intelligence and Research, said on 8 June 1964 that "a falling out among our potential enemies" was a welcome development, one that called for a flexible response on the part of the United States.

Besides deriving satisfaction from the Sino-Soviet split, the United States made its own assessment of the views of the two sides and expressed its clear preference for the Soviet view in so far it recognized the dangers of a nuclear war and the desperate need for peace in the world. It also judged the views of the two sides in the light of their bearing on the relations between the Communist bloc and itself. The Chinese wanted the Socialist countries to take a militant line towards the West.

56 Ibid., vol. 50, no. 1285, 10 February 1964, p. 133.
57 Ibid., vol. 50, no. 1286, 17 February 1964, p. 247.
59 Ibid., vol. 51, no. 1306, 6 July 1964, p. 11.
The Soviets were inclined to try peaceful co-existence. As the Soviet view was far less hostile, the United States naturally hoped that the Soviets would prevail over the Chinese within the Communist bloc. Rusk said:

To the extent that the dispute is about militancy versus genuine peaceful co-existence, we prefer recognition of the dangers of war in this nuclear age. The Soviets have not abandoned their basic goal of world revolution, nor have they renounced all force for the settlement of international disputes. Nevertheless, we think they show a better understanding than the Chinese communists of the dangers and meaning of nuclear war. (60)

On the whole, US policy-makers felt that a possible nuclear explosion by China would be dangerous though they realized that it would take a long time for China to achieve sophisticated development in the area of nuclear weapons. They, therefore, did not consider China as important as the Soviet Union. Unlike China, the Soviet Union recognized the necessity of detente with the United States. Moscow's voice obviously carried more weight in US circles, for it was the more powerful of the two antagonists.

IV. China's Statements After Its Nuclear Detonation on 16 October 1964

China's vehement protest against the Test-Ban Treaty made it clear that it would develop a nuclear capability of its own to undo the effects of the treaty. Indeed China never made any effort to hide its ambitions in the nuclear field. The question before it was not whether it should possess nuclear weapons but how soon it right acquire them. It knew fully well that its

60 Ibid., vol. 50, no. 1235, 22 January 1964, p. 193.
capability would be limited, that it might not be able to com-
mmand for a long time the necessary means for the delivery of
nuclear weapons, and that, therefore, instant change in the
world balance of power was out of the question. And yet it went
ahead with its plans and exploded its first nuclear device on
16 October 1964. Obviously it meant this explosion to serve as
a political weapon that would produce a psychological effect on
the world.

China's statements after this event throw light on a
number of issues in its foreign policy. Our concern with them
here is of course limited to their implications for Sino-U3
relations.

In the very first statement that China issued after ex-
ploding its first nuclear device, it declared that it was "con-
ducting nuclear tests and developing nuclear weapons under
compulsion". It said that it could not afford to remain "idle,
in the face of ever-increasing nuclear threats from the United
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States". It criticized the United States for seeking ever
greater perfection in nuclear tests, for stationing submarines
in Japan, and for trying to blackmail smaller nations. However,
it assured the world that its aim was wholly to ensure its own
security. "China is developing nuclear weapons for defence and
for protecting the Chinese people from US threats to launch a

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61 For the statement of the Chinese Government issued on
16 October 1964, see Break the Nuclear Monopoly, Elimi-
nate Nuclear Weapons (Peking: Foreign Languages Press,
nuclear war".

The United States characterized the event as a tragedy. It especially deplored China's decision to divert its scarce resources to the development of a costly weapon.

A *Jen-min Jih-pao* editorial on 22 October expressed satisfaction that China had broken the nuclear monopoly of the United States. It referred to the "U.S. Seventh Fleet's actions" at the very door of China, as also to alleged U.S. attempts at nuclear blackmail. It argued:

Speaking frankly, China is not obsessed by the idea of possessing nuclear weapons. If U.S. imperialism did not develop them, China need not develop them. But as long as U.S. imperialism possesses nuclear bombs, China must have them too. Whether by deceit, intimidation or slander, Lyndon Johnson cannot make the Chinese people alter this stand. (63)

Whether China turned nuclear because of the U.S. nuclear threat or under some other compulsion is a matter of opinion. What is clear from the Chinese statements is that the United States loomed large as a sinister force in Chinese eyes at this stage.

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62 Ibid., p. 3. The arguments in Premier Chou's cable to heads of Government of the world on similar lines. Ibid., p. 10.

63 Ibid., p. 15, for the *Jen-min Jih-pao* editorial of 22 October 1964.

64 Ibid. According to Halperin and Perkins, one basic Chinese motive for acquiring a nuclear capability was to reduce the likelihood of nuclear blackmail by the United States against China. See F.A. Halperin and Dwight H. Perkins, *Communist China and Arms Control* (New York, 1965), p. 65.
In the various statements it issued after detonation China made several proposals for disarmament. However, the aim of the proposals was not much to promote disarmament as to expose US policies. Premier Chou En-lai in a cable to the various heads of Government of the world on 17 October 1964 called for a summit conference of all the countries to promote complete prohibition and thorough destruction of nuclear weapons. As a first step he suggested an agreement among the nuclear Powers and potential nuclear Powers that they would not use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear countries and nuclear-free zones or against each other. At this time China was isolated. It wanted (i) to mobilize the Third World against the United States and (ii) to restrain US activity around and in the neighbourhood of China.

The Chinese Government declared on 16 October that it would never "at any time or under any circumstances be the first to use nuclear weapons". It reiterated that it had acquired nuclear weapons solely for self-defence and for countering US nuclear threats. It sought through its proposal for a ban on nuclear weapons to generate sufficient political pressure that

65 For Chou En-lai's communication dated 17 October 1964 to the various heads of Government, see Break the Nuclear Monopoly, Eliminate Nuclear Weapons, n. 62, p. 9.
67 Ibid., p. 16, for the Jan-min Jih-pao editorial of 22 October 1964.
would deter the United States from using nuclear weapons. The proposal was also meant as an answer to the American demand that China should sign a test-ban treaty before proceeding with other agreements.

An editorial in Jen-min jih-pao on 22 November 1964 discussed some of the proposals regarding arms control. It rejected the proposal for a partial test-ban treaty on the ground that such a treaty would not prevent the United States from continuing to use, manufacture, or stockpile nuclear weapons or from conducting underground nuclear tests. It felt that even a complete test-ban treaty would make no difference. For one thing the United States had already acquired sufficient technical data to retain its nuclear monopoly. Secondly, a total ban would only spread a false sense of security. As regards the third proposal viz. the proposal for the destruction of delivery vehicles, the editorial conceded that the proposal looked attractive, but pointed out how it could be rendered ineffective by the use of ordinary aircraft to serve as delivery vehicles. It, therefore, called for a no-first-use agreement among all nuclear Powers. It argued that the United States in such a case would be unable to intimidate others with nuclear weapons.


69 Editorial, Jen-min jih-pao, 22 November 1964. It was felt that the article showed some amount of sophistication as regards armament proposals. See Halperin, n. 68, p. 10.
From China's comments on the various disarmament proposals, we may infer some of the important objectives it had in mind.

First, the statements underline China's emphasis on self-reliance as a national policy. The detonation was a loud affirmation of this policy of self-reliance. Indeed it represented a resounding success for China's scientific and technological advance in the nuclear field. Secondly, the statements bring out China's emphasis on the "self-defence" aspect. Thirdly, China wanted the explosion to serve as a psychological boost to the cause of "national liberation". The very first statement issued by China after the detonation claimed that the success in the nuclear field was "a great encouragement to the revolutionary people of the world in their struggle". China also sought through the explosion to boost the morale of its peoples to extend its influence within the Communist bloc, and to burnish its own image in Asia.

Though China appeared to make much of the explosion, it was under no illusion about the feat it had achieved. The detonation was only meant to achieve a political purpose by making an impact on the psychology of both friend and foe. From the military point of view it was not sufficiently credible. The

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70 See text of statement dated 16 October 1964 issued by the Government of the People's Republic of China, in Break Nuclear Monopoly, Eliminate Nuclear Weapons, n. 61, p. 3.

71 M.H. Halperin mentions four principal Chinese objectives. See Halperin, n. 68, p. 3.
moderation that was discernible in the Chinese statements was perhaps intended to reduce the risk of provoking an American attack on China. It was also perhaps intended to allay the fears of the smaller countries bordering China.

**An Analysis of China's Nuclear Policy**

A study of China's nuclear policy may be undertaken at this stage in the light of China's reaction to the Test-Ban Treaty. This policy played a significant role in Sino-US relations in spite of Mao's apparently contemptuous ideological characterization of the atomic bomb as a paper tiger and the consequent confusion in the West as to the real intentions of China as regards its nuclear option. The Test-Ban Treaty of 1963 snuffed out all hopes of an early improvement in Sino-US relations although the treaty itself was a product of forces which had little to do with Sino-US relations as such. In the sixties, by forging its own nuclear weapons, China compelled the United States to take it seriously. Though a small Power in terms of military strength compared with the two Super Powers, China posed a major foreign-policy problem for the United States. It is, therefore, important for us to consider China's views on nuclear weapons.

Chinese propaganda portrayed the atomic bomb as a "paper tiger" on the basis of Mao's theory that what made for victory in
a war was the people, not weapons, not even nuclear weapons. Although the atomic bomb might destroy industrial centres and economic resources of the enemy during the strategic bombing phase, the army was necessary to terminate the war, to destroy the enemy, to occupy positions, to win victory. To rely on the army was to rely primarily on men.

We have already offered some explanations above as regards China's attitude towards nuclear weapons. The basic question relates to tactics and strategy. It was only from a long-term point of view that the Maoists categorized the atomic bomb as a "paper tiger". Practically, i.e. in the short run, they took them seriously.

What did China seek to achieve through wide publicity for its theory that the atomic bomb was only a "paper tiger"? One objective was obviously to make political capital out of the nuclear question through anti-US propaganda. It wanted to show that the United States was attempting to dominate small countries through nuclear blackmail and present itself as a champion of the countries that were allegedly being so blackmailed. Secondly, it hoped to cover up its own technological inferiority at that time by pretending that it was strong enough to stand up to the

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United States even without nuclear parity. It did not want to expose its weakness in the nuclear field. Thirdly, it felt that till it acquires its own nuclear capability and filled the obvious gap in its military preparedness it would be a good idea to project the "people's army" as an invincible force in any kind of war. This would, among other things, strengthen the morale of the people, especially vis-a-vis the United States.

China also emphasized the concept of paper tiger as an ideological instrument for use in its controversy with the Soviet Union. Some people in the West were naive enough to take Chinese statements at their face value. They thought that China was not sufficiently aware of the dangerous consequences of a nuclear war. Arguments on this subject can swing from one extreme to another, for one can cite Chinese statements to support either extreme. But if we take an integrated view of Chinese statements, actions, and behaviour, we can see that China understood the importance of the nuclear weapons well enough. It was by no means ignorant of the dimensions of a possible nuclear confrontation. What it was worried over was the denial of that instrument in its own case and the tilting of the balance of forces as a consequence against itself. It wanted to possess that weapon, for only then could it possibly hope to change the status quo in its favour.

V. China’s Nuclear Explosion and the US Reaction

Even before China exploded a nuclear device, the United States was fairly certain (no doubt on the basis of the information available to it) that such an event would occur. On 29 September 1964 the US Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, said that China might bring off a nuclear explosion in the near future. He, however, tried to play down the importance of such a possibility by saying that the detonation of a first nuclear device would not mean a stockpile of nuclear weapons and the availability of a modern delivery system. A report by Seymour Topping in the New York Times threw light on the Administration’s thinking on a possible nuclear explosion by China. It noted that China had given high priority to nuclear and missile development with a view to exploding a nuclear device. It also noted that China had achieved the technical and industrial capacity needed for such an experiment. It felt that the aim of China’s programme was to impress the countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America rather raise its own status to that of a first-class military Power in the sixties. The New York Times said in an editorial that it saw nothing to be scared about in China’s exploding a nuclear device. It pointed out that China lacked the capacity to deliver such weapons. In order to allay the fears

77 Ibid., 1 October 1964.
of countries bordering China, it argued that any attempt by China to use nuclear explosions to threaten its neighbours "would invite crushing retaliation, tremendously disproportionate to the damage China's nuclear powers could inflict". When China eventually brought off the explosion of a nuclear device, President Johnson said in a television speech that what Peking had exploded was "a low yield" atomic bomb. He added:

This explosion came as no surprise to the United States Government. It has been fully taken into account in planning our own defence program and nuclear capability. Its military significance should not be overestimated. Many years and great efforts separate testing of a first nuclear device from having a stockpile of reliable weapons with effective delivery systems. (79)

The President expressed his readiness to help any "western nation struggling against possible Chinese aggression. He deplored the Chinese policy of diverting economic resources to the production of a crude nuclear device. In his view this was a tragedy for the Chinese people. He stressed that the event was of "limited significance" in order to allay the fears of the countries of Asia. And yet it was clear that the United States was much disturbed by the event in view of its significant political and

78 Editorial, New York Times, 1 October 1964. Also see article by John W. Finney, ibid., 1 October 1964.

military implications.

Various explanations were advanced in the United States as regards the significance of Peking's explosion of an atomic bomb. The New York Times carried a report quoting diplomatic experts that Peking might take a more aggressive line in foreign policy, especially in Southeast Asia. It felt that the political significance of the explosion was more important than the military one. All were agreed that the explosion had not changed the balance of power although it was recognized that China had an impressive potential in the field. In an editorial the paper suggested negotiations with China to end the arms race. The Christian Science Monitor disagreed with the general view that there was a long interval between a test explosion and the attainment of the capability to deliver a nuclear device on a far-off target. It, therefore, called for urgent measures to check nuclear proliferation. It suggested that the USA and the USSR should jointly work to check proliferation of nuclear weapons. It expressed its support for the efforts that were being made in

80 Ibid., p. 137. It was similarly argued in some intellectual circles that China's possession of nuclear weapons did not alter the status quo and hence should not cause serious concern to the USA. See "China and the Bomb", New Republic (Washington, D.C.), vol. 151, no. 15, 10 October 1964, p. 3.


82 Ibid., editorial, 19 October 1964.

83 Christian Science Monitor (Boston, Mass.), 19 October 1964.
the direction of securing arms limitation agreements jointly underwritten by the USA and the USSR. Finally, it called upon the non-aligned countries to put pressures on China and secure its participation in agreements leading to non-proliferation of nuclear weapons.

In a television address on 18 October President Johnson asserted that despite Chinese nuclear explosion the key to peace lay in US strength. He pledged all non-nuclear nations "our strong support against some threat of nuclear blackmail" from China. He said he was aware of the danger of the spread of nuclear weapons. He characterized the explosion as "sad and serious", all the more so because other nuclear Powers were "sober and serious states, with long experience as major Powers in the world", whereas China had no such experience.

In an interview on 13 October, the US Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, agreed that China's prestige had gone up as a result of its explosion. At the same time he observed that China had incurred much ill will by upsetting "efforts on the part of every other nation to end atmospheric testing" and frustrating the "hopes of mankind". He said that the United States was prepared to pursue its efforts to secure a comprehensive nuclear test-ban treaty banning all nuclear tests, but added that no nuclear Power wanted now to sign "an agreement eliminating all

84 MaoFarquhar, n. 47, pp. 210-11.
nuclear tests underground and otherwise unless the Chinese communists came aboard and stop testing on their side”.

The Defence Secretary, Robert S. McNamara, said on 22 October that the Chinese device was of a "pre-emptive" type and posed no military threat to the United States and its allies. It would, he felt, take many years for China to "obtain the capacity to inflict nuclear damage on this country or our allies". He, however, affirmed the danger of proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Other US statements, too, confirmed this concern about the proliferation of nuclear weapons. What, however, gave edge to this concern was the fact that nuclear weapons had come into the hands of a country which was already hostile to the United States and which was giving every evidence of continuing its policy of hostility to the United States.

**Conclusion**

As the USA and the USSR were simultaneously following a policy of improving relations with each other, China felt isolated. It thought that the United States was bent on opposing it everywhere, and so it decided to direct all its energies to frustrate what it perceived as US designs for world subjugation. The issue of nuclear weapons played an important role in the

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36 Ibid., pp. 654-5.
deterioration of Sino-U.S. relations. Sino-American relations entered upon an even more hostile phase following China's nuclear explosion. We have dealt with the question at length in order to show how in the period preceding the escalation of the Vietnam war the issue of nuclear weapons conditioned Sino-U.S. relations and further intensified the mutual hostility.